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## December 1968

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# campus commentary



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December, 1968

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Dear Brother:

You will be happy to hear that with the nearness of Christmas I have laid aside all thoughts of my campaign for the presidency of Synod. This letter came at precisely the moment when I put some carols on the machine in the corner and began to compare their message with the petty, tawdry machinations of our synodical life.

However, Theophilus is an exception; he has a one-track mind and will probably plan the campaign on Christmas Eve. If he can get it into the same room with "O, Come all Ye Faithful," more power to him.

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## LETTER FROM THEOPHILUS

Dear O.P.,

In my capacity as your campaign manager I have been traveling around the church (see expense account attached) and doing a little in-depth surveying of your prospects. I thought you might be interested in the results.

To the question: "Would you like to see O. P. Kretzmann elected President of the Church?" I got the following responses:

Yes .....	3
No .....	276
Which Kretzmann is That? .....	22
Which Church do You Mean? .....	14
Don't Know, Undecided, or Agnostic .....	7

Of course, these are only preliminary figures. We shall have a better reading on the situation after I get back from the two-month intensive-analysis tour of Florida, Arizona, and southern California which I plan to make in January and February (and for which I would appreciate an advance so that I can make hotel and airline reservations). I understand that there is a man in Miami who is willing to vote for you on the fourth ballot and another one in Burbank who is uncommitted. I'll see what I can do to firm these up.

Meanwhile, I am more than a little ticked off. I specifically asked you not to go issuing any manifestoes or platforms. So what happens? So in that last yellow sheet of yours there is this twelve-point platform — in bold face yet! I found it on a brother's desk in Vermont last month (incidentally, the autumn foliage was lovely), and his only comment was: "Looks like you've got the poor man's Spiro T. Agnew on your hands." So, once again, and in the smallest, simplest words I can find: "Keep your mouth shut." Remember those immortal words of Calvin Coolidge: "No man ever had to explain anything he didn't say."

Now that your platform is out we shall, unfortunately, have to live with it. This means that we shall have to write off both the honest liberals and the honest conservatives and go all-out for the lunatic fringe. Realistically, I doubt that there are enough votes there to put you over the top. The Church is deeply troubled, but there are still strong bonds of love and sanity which militate against any extremist solution to its problems. And we have just enough of a corporate memory of Luther's explanation of the Fourth Commandment that when our leaders are reviled or unfairly criticized we rally around them.

Incidentally, I'm afraid that I may have made a little contribution of my own to bolixing your chances. A columnist up in Milwaukee who is, with good reason, highly respected in the Church picked up my suggestion that we appeal to "as many brethren as we can find who are known to be disturbed by what the psychiatrists call 'floating anxieties'" and in a very decent, thoughtful way pointed out that these people deserve neither our scorn nor contempt, but our love and concern. He is, of course, quite right. And while I would be quite willing to defend the proposition that much of the turmoil of the Church is a product of these "free-floating anxieties," I hope that neither of us would be so eager for office that we would aggravate or play upon them. Simply on the practical level, that strategy has already been developed and refined to its probable ultimate by one large element of the opposition.

Through to Victory —  
Theophilus



The carols: A choir began to sing "Hark, the herald angels sing" — and brought all heaven before my eyes. "Glory to the Newborn King" — and our little strivings suddenly looked small and shabby now. I must sing of "Peace on earth and mercy mild" because I have seen "God and sinners reconciled." The height and depth, the width and range of "Joyful all ye nations rise" left me without words about synod rising against synod. Perhaps all "doctrinal" statements should be sung.

And yet the issues should remain clear and sharp. I must, therefore, spoil the Christmas spirit, at least momentarily, by printing in this place a quotation from "Faith-Life", a little journal which was born several decades ago as the result of a controversy in the Wisconsin Synod. It came to my desk via the "Christian News" which reprinted it in its letter column, apparently to prove that others have said worse things about the Missouri Synod than the "Christian News." The quoted paragraph is from an account of the 1965 convention of the Missouri Synod. It reads as follows:

"The Missouri Synod is in fact a rutting herd of beasts sniffing the air for some new whiff which will send the pack running in the pursuit of new whoredoms. Observe, however, how the pack goes quickly from one to the other in its spiritual adultery. The rejected First Love is forgotten and never thought of. He sits in heaven spurned by his one-time bride. But, remember Missouri, the First Love is also your Judge and He is standing at the door. His wrath is fearful to contemplate as is your godless apostasy. Remember from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else he will come unto you quickly; and remove your candlestick out of its place."

"And you, Dr. Harms, who are relaxed and pleased at the convention and the way it went, don't you know you have a God to face and give account to? Such relaxation and pleasure which you enjoy is from Satan, the devil in hell, and blinds you, holding you captive in his snares so that you are doing his work and not God's. Ponder the meaning of what I say, for the words are carefully and deliberately chosen. Then read on."

I finished the paragraph, gulped, ran for a glass of water, some aspirin and Luke 2. There is a heresy of the heart, born of feverish, hysterical hate, which is just as sick and sad as the heresy of the mind.

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## FORWARD TO CHRISTMAS:

This letter was written twenty years ago. There is no need for changing it even now:

Dear Son: This is now your sixth Christmas on earth, and the writing of these letters has become a part of me. . . . For many years most of my letters have been about business and meetings and all kinds of little things . . . . they are not really very important, and when they stop, there will be only a very little hole in the world, hardly big enough to hold a few hours of mourning. . . . But this one is different. . . . It is about something outside and inside . . . . so far away from our strange half-light world of daily things to do that I am always happy when Christmas comes and I can write one letter about something beyond and beneath the routine and riddle of living. . . .

One day this fall, just as the earliest leaves drifted over our roof, you started off for school the first time. . . . You will not remember the day, I suppose, but I will see it for many years. . . . Your mother put your coat on, and as you started for the door, I seemed to see a touch of fear in your eyes . . . . perhaps a dim realization that this was the beginning of something new and strange which would end finally in manhood and going away and the breaking of the completeness of home. . . . A part of your life, even now, would be beyond the walls which held all of life these first five years. . . . You did not know it, but Mark and I watched you as you wandered up the street, a forlorn and gnomelike figure, until you turned the corner and disappeared in the dull September day. . . . Even Mark, who lives as momentarily and happily as the squirrel in our elm, seemed to feel that something great and final had happened. . . . He wanted to know if you were really going away, when you would be back, and what we were going to do in the meantime. . . . I gave him his little red truck and returned to my desk. . . . Beyond my window three starlings were chattering about winter, and a red apple fell from our neighbor's tree. . . . Suddenly it seemed to grow cold in the house, and the years, all of them now, were heavy upon my soul. . . .

Of course, the final meaning of your going to school is the fact that all the things you will learn in the next twenty years may enable you to understand Christmas a little better. . . . No, I just thought that over again, and it may not be true. . . . Some of the things you will learn, unless you discover how to put them in their proper place and order, will only set your feet on the long and lonely road away from Bethlehem. . . . If they tell you, for example, that men have done great things, you can believe them if you remember that God has done greater things. . . . When they tell you, as they will, that the real things are the things you can touch and see and feel, you must add that the most real things in heaven and earth are not money and machines and houses, but faith and hope and love . . . . the things unseen. . . . God and what He means . . . . Christmas and God being seen . . . . on a winter night . . . . among things that some people in schools despise.

And sometimes I wonder if you will ever really know more about that than you do now. . . . Somewhere in the years ahead you will probably learn some big words and thoughts about what happened at midnight in Bethlehem so many years ago. . . . Somebody, I hope, will tell you that this is the Incarnation, the mystery of godliness, the one and only intrusion of the divine into the human, the profound and



holy riddle of God taking on human flesh, entering our ranks, assuming our nature, translating Himself, the Eternal and Omniscient, into our idiom, born into Bethlehem in a temporal generation as He was with the Father of old in an eternal generation. . . . All of that is true, and it is important to know . . . it is one of the gifts of Wise Men to the Child . . . we call it theology . . . and one can become a good theologian by doing some hard thinking (and believing), while one stands in the stable with the ox and the sheep and the shepherds, all cold from the winter outside. . . .

But when you have learned all these things you will really not be closer to Christmas than you are now. . . . As the years go on, I hope you will think about it more — and more deeply — but you cannot believe it more. . . . You will remember that last week we began the Christmas season, the journey to Bethlehem, much longer for me than for you, by putting some black disks on the machine in the living room and sitting quietly in the firelight while the music poured into our souls. . . . There they were again, the old and lovely sounds by which men have tried to say something about Christmas. . . . “Silent Night, Holy Night” — “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” — “Oh Come, All Ye Faithful” — “The Lullaby of the Virgin” . . . They come from many hands and many lands, these songs in the night, but all of them say the same thing . . . the incredible beauty and wonder of the Child in the manger . . . the kindness of God to remember us in the middle of the night . . . the lights, the stars, the shepherds, the mother . . . all of them, in our room once more . . . to tell us that this is really Christmas . . . so good and so simple that it is for little children who are five or thirty or sixty years old . . . for everybody . . .

And that is the real Christmas. . . . You will have it again this year, while some men outside are making bombs which may kill you on a battlefield far away from our tree and our lights and our songs . . . Sometimes I think of that, and my heart cries out with fear for you and all little boys who will have a good and holy Christmas this year. . . . But then I remember that He came to take that fear away too . . . all fear . . . until there is nothing dark and nothing hopeless and nothing without Him. . . .

A few days ago I saw some very good and wise words written many years ago by a good man. . . . His name was St. Ambrose: “In Christ, then, are all things. Christ is everything to us. If thou hast wounds to be healed, He is thy physician; if fever scorches thee, He is a fountain; wouldst thou punish evil-doing, He is justice; dost thou need help, He is strength; dost thou fear death, He is life; dost thou long for heaven, He is the way; dost thou flee from darkness, He is light; dost thou hunger, He is food.”

All this, you say, in a little baby? . . . Yes, all this in a little baby!

**NOTES FROM A WINTER WINDOW:** Someone has come down the street, and the light from the lamp on the corner makes each step a little pool of shadow. By this line of shadow I know that a man has passed here, hurrying to shelter against the cold. Before morning, however, the slow drifting of the snow will have covered his steps, and there will be only a faint mark to show that once a man had come this way. By the trick of association or conflict I remember that a man came into the office this afternoon, angry and bitter, to tell me about one of the quarrels which have a way of appearing in all academic communities when spirits are low and nerves are raw from the steady grind of a long semester. This quarrel, my friend informed me, would never end. There was no chance for a reconciliation. “I will not speak to him again.” As I looked at his flushed face and trembling hands, I wondered, as I wonder now, if he was not talking only about footsteps in the snow. The momentary pools of shadow — the hurt which will not matter in the morning. The hole in life which will be covered by the drift of the years as surely as the footsteps beyond my window will disappear during the night.

There is little religion in this, unless it be religious to use the common sense with which the Creator has endowed us. Increasingly, during the past decade, I have been bewildered by the feverish, neurotic concern of men and women with the immediate, the momentary, and the little. Almost every emotional problem which has crossed my path could have been solved with a truthful answer to the question: “What will it matter ten years from now?” or better yet, “What will it matter when the drifting of the years has ended and there is only the light at the last corner.” “He insulted me” — “He ignores my authority” — “He has maligned me” — “He laughs at me” — What will it matter when nothing matters but that, though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as snow? The only lasting mark made on the world, no matter how great or how important we consider our little footsteps, is the straight mark behind them made by a dragging Cross.

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**NOTES ON A TORN CASSOCK:** Undoubtedly you have kept a curious eye on the current aches and pains of the Roman Catholic Church. Compounded of the results of Vatican II and the encyclical of Paul VI “Human Vitae,” unhappily wedded in time, the internal situation in Rome threatens to become a theological Donnybrook. In a cover story “TIME” notes: “July 29, 1968, may prove to be a major landmark in the long history of the Roman Catholic Church — as significant, perhaps, as the moment when Martin Luther decided to post his Theses on indulgences at Wittenberg Castle Church. On that day last summer Pope Paul VI promulgated his seventh encyclical, “Human Vitae” which condemned all methods of contraception as against God’s natural law” . . .

These yellow sheets are only secondarily interested in the original question. That will be decided in the agonizing hearts and minds of millions of good Roman Catholics, despite the thunder of a thousand bishops and the erratic, blind lightning of the Curia.

The real drama, however, lurks elsewhere. This is the first really dramatic challenge to the authority



of the Bishop of Rome in more than four hundred years. Rome has spoken but Rome's children are not about to listen. The authority of the entire hierarchy is now the question. **This is a confrontation.**

It must be the focus of interest for us separated brethren. Our first reaction could very well be a sense of joy, a "Schadenfreude." "Rome has finally got its come-uppance." It is clear that nothing could be more Pharisaic, more sinful, more self-damaging. Even though the Body of Christ in our time is broken and torn, it is still true that whatever hurts one part of it, eventually will hurt all other parts, especially in this apocalyptic day. We know (and the bishops know) that Paul VI of course had something like this coming to him; his astounding failure to read Vatican II accurately had already become abundantly clear.

Our interest in the controversy must be sympathetic — and selfish. The desire to be rid of one authority, must, inevitably, lead to the denial of all authority. This is the whole danger — also for us. Denying the authority of the Latin See today — an authority which we have considered wrong and unscriptural — can and will lead to a questioning of the true and scriptural authority of the divine Word.

This is the way things go in the Church, especially in our individualistic, rebellious age. (Side remark: It is interesting to note that Paul VI does not use Scripture in his encyclical. His whole argument rests on the foggy notion of the "natural law.") There is great room for the idea of authority in the Christian faith; but it must be the authority of freedom in Christ, the inescapable authority of the Word, the lordship of Jesus Christ in the Word. This is the "new" authority which Luther found and made a great and singular glory and power.

That the Roman revolt may — and will — spread to all types of authority in the Church — this is our real and present danger. We must therefore watch the current conflict carefully, sympathetically and prayerfully. In the final analysis the revolution is not against "authority" but against the virtue of obedience — obedience to the wrong thing today and (thinking of our restless, shallow time) obedience to the right thing tomorrow. Already Protestantism has lost this virtue almost entirely. This is especially and tragically true of our youth: "Come disaster or despair — I will not be obedient."

The present crisis in Rome is only part of a larger crisis in our errant society. It well deserves our attention and our prayers. There, but for the grace of God, go we! Trent was not the answer; neither is the license of a wayward generation four hundred years later. We should face the ominous, simple fact: "You are next"!

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**NOTES ON A FRAYED CUFF:** A glimpse of our 1968 world from the "Detroit Lutheran":

"About 35 per cent of Detroit's 1,641,800 workers are employed in manufacturing, including 14 per cent who work in automotive and related industries.

"Factory earnings in Detroit average \$3.87 an hour — nearly a dollar more than the national figure of \$2.95.

"More than 1/3 of Detroiters have a spendable, aftertax income of \$10,000 or over, a considerably higher percentage than the figure for all U. S. families — 21.5.

"Annual construction volume in the Detroit area has passed the \$1 billion mark — 45 percent of it going into new housing.

"Nearly \$200 million in redevelopment has been started or completed in Detroit urban renewal areas. Another \$200 million of construction has been announced.

"Detroiters spend and save at a fast pace. Retail sales exceed \$7 billion a year, up 70 per cent since 1960. Bank deposits also have increased at the same rate."

A long way, my masters, from the running shepherds and the following sheep. A special good wish to the Detroit brethren (and New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and San Francisco) for much joy and hope and strength in their Christmas sermons.

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Whenever it comes, I pay close attention to President Harms' "Memo to my Brethren" — not so much to the words as to the spirit in which they are written. I clean my glasses (most academic memos can and should be read through foggy glasses), lower my head and look sharp and hard. Is the president affected negatively by the horrible mail he gets? Has he lost his cool? Will he apply the administrative approach which Peter used with Malchus?

The answer is "No!" Long since a lesser man would have blown his top or accepted a call to the deaf-mute missions. But No — "Please brethren (in a note on our conference with ALC brethren) take up these conversations because you trust the Word of God and because you want the Holy Spirit to create unity in the Church. This is vastly more important than meeting in a mechanical way the requirements of a synodical resolution." (Cf. paragraphs above). He may be getting close to the "seventy-times-seven" but he is still O.K.

Have you any money? Do you know anybody who has some money? You may have noted (gratefully) that these yellow sheets say little about Valparaiso University and its needs? This is a recognition of the fact that the University has much better means to bring its work and wants to you and your



good people. But now and then we might make an exception. I have just returned from Europe and I have been greatly pleased with our work in England and in Germany. We now have three excellent centers in Europe and the University is becoming widely and favorably known. Its influence, through its own work and its five hundred graduates each year, is really becoming worldwide. And, bless God, it is thoroughly Lutheran — in its loyalties, its program and its vision of the future. Please help!

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I have long been impressed with the strange ways all manner of things land eventually on my desk. It appears that many a good brother — torn between the desire to throw something in the wastebasket or filing it away — decides to send it to me. I have become a synodical “Spucknaff.”

This by way of introduction to a poem which came in a very curious way. Dr. Paul H. Krauss of Ft. Wayne, one of God’s emissaries to the land of Canaan, delivers an address “The Relation of Theology to Social Issues,” sends a copy to his friend Dr. Charles B. Foelsch (another trumpeter at Jericho) who returns it with a poem by S. J. Forrest “Get With It,” describing the feelings of a frustrated preacher. Doctor Krauss, in turn, sends the whole interchange to his friend E. J. Gallmeyer who finally sends it to me. The verse can be sung to the tune “Titwillow” from the “Mikado.” Since we too have an occasional brother whose motto is “Get-with-it,” the poem is singularly appropriate for an age — and a Church — constantly hearing the admonition to get up-to-date and to reflect the latest fad of a faddist world. You don’t like Bach played by a drum, a guitar, and a saxophone? You don’t like “world” campaigns that forget the need of the neighbor next door? You are suspicious of “liturgical reforms” which are neither “liturgical” nor “reforms?” Get-with-it, brother, get-with-it!” Here is the poem:

The organ I’ve changed for Electric Guitars  
Yea, with it, yea with it, yea with it . . .  
Remodeled the church as a drive in for cars  
So with it, yea with it, quite with it.  
Now I’ve demythologized most of the creed  
To tally with contemporaneous need  
And morals — from every imperative freed  
To be with it, yea with it, dead with it . . .  
I’ll follow the fashion wherever I’m led  
Tho it finally tells me to stand on my head  
And I firmly intend to, tho I tumble down dead  
To be with it, all with it, yea with it!

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## FOOTNOTES TO HISTORY

In a few more days, brother, another year will end. You will be standing in your pulpit at the quiet “Sylvester” (too bad we have lost that word) service to speak to a few faithful souls about Life, Time, History and the ultimate meaning of the rushing years. A few footnotes for your sermon:

More than nineteen hundred years since Calvary, but never has the need for clear thinking been more desperate. Now, as seldom before, we need the steadying strength of eternal principles in a world of chaos. We must know again that the lights are still there no matter how black the night. For the moment — but only for the moment — eternal principles may be footnotes to the story men are writing in blood and tears. Footnotes, however, which will one day again be lifted into the text of the world’s history by the hand of God. Time to recall a few to be filed for future reference either in heaven or on earth.

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First Footnote: All events in the history of the world must serve the Church. The universe, from the Pleiades to Moscow, stands because the Church is here. For the moment — but only for the moment — the words of men are the loud accompaniment to the relentless music of the living God. Out of the welter of events we must now build a philosophy of history. It is a curious thing that a consistent, unified view of the world and time is ordinarily achieved only by the very great and the very humble. St. Augustine and the old peasant woman whom I met in Canada a few years ago.

As I entered the little house on the prairies of Saskatchewan, she was seated beside a table on which there were a Bible and a radio. The voice of God and the whisper of the world. For almost eleven years she had been chained to that chair by a crippling arthritis. In a language which was rich with the strength of the earth and the years she told me how the world looked through the glasses of her Bible and her radio. She said: “Men have done great things during the past few years. They are able to move across the earth faster than ever before. They can cross the seas in great ships. They can fly through the air more swiftly than the birds. It seems now as if they can go almost anywhere. But at the end there is a narrow ditch about three feet wide which stops them in their tracks. No machine can carry them across that last great barrier.” In a few sentences she had consigned the mad men of our modern world to the dust. This is a philosophy of history.



**Second Footnote:** A philosophy of history which knows that the purposes of God are being accomplished is not, however, a passive philosophy. It is my duty to fight evil wherever and whenever it may appear. Especially in times like these the Christian mind and heart lives under protest. I have been dismayed lately to see good Christians retire into a shrugging quietism. They use the Christian philosophy of history as a hiding place rather than a point of attack. The fact that God will eventually make good come out of evil does not release the Christian mind from the unrelenting fight against wickedness. We pray as though everything were in God's hands; we work as though everything were in ours. There may be a mystery here, but it is a mystery for our minds and not for our hands. We may not be able to explain the ways of God with man; but we do have His clear, eternal Word as a guide for action and not as an excuse for retreat. "Thy will be done" is a prayer that the divine purposes be accomplished on and in a world which is "Thine." It is also a prayer which is terribly personal. "Thy will be done" at whatever cost by me over against this world which rejects Thee. De Caussade once wrote: "All that is done in us, around us, and by us contains and conceals the action of God. There it is most truly and certainly present, but invisible; so that it always surprises us and we only recognize its working when it is withdrawn. If we could pierce the veil, God would show Himself to us without ceasing, and we should realize His action in all that happens to us. To each thing we should say, **Dominus est**. It is the Lord. And we should find in every circumstance that we had received a gift from God. We should consider all creatures as feeble tools in the hands of an all-powerful craftsman and should easily recognize that we lack nothing and that God's continual care gives us at each moment that which is best for us."

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**Third Footnote:** In times like these it is particularly important to emphasize the principles by which a Christian lives in the world — especially his relation to the governments of this earth. Here the guiding lights are the first and fourth verses of the thirteenth chapter of the Letter to the Romans. As long as the governments of this world do not cross the boundaries imposed by the will of God, the Christian heart will be loyal to the constituted authorities. This loyalty is not confined to mere lip service, but extends to the heart. No fifth columnist can be a Christian. No Christian can be a fifth columnist. Since God has placed me in this blessed land, I must be profoundly and unswervingly loyal to the democratic principles of political and religious liberty laid down in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution of the United States. It is impossible for a Christian to be loyal to any other government, its ideas and ideals, rather than to his own. The only reservation is that the government must demand nothing of the individual which will be against his conscience. When the will of God and the will of the State conflict, there be only one answer. I must obey God rather than man.

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**Fourth Footnote:** It is tragically important for the Christian heart not to lose its moral sensitivity in these calloused days. While I remember that in all the struggles and conflicts of this present world there are no saints, but only sinners fighting each other, I remember, on the other hand, that there are types and degrees of evil. Although my choice is seldom between black and white, but only between shades of gray, I must nevertheless make the choice. Two things I must see clearly. First, wrongs have been committed by all men. Secondly, the greater wrong for the present and the future lies with the powers that would destroy the values of Western civilization. Remind me sometime to talk about a principled Lutheran situation.

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**Only footnotes:** Perhaps no one will pay much attention to them. The tired voice of the commentator from London sounds in the night: "I return you to NBC, New York." Dawn is breaking over Europe. One day there will be another dawn, shining and eternal. Breathless, humanity will wait for the final verdict on history. It will not be, I know and believe, in terms of war and bloodshed, dictators and death, fear and hate. There will be a voice speaking of forgiveness, of a cup of cold water, of enduring unto the end. And the headlines of time will become the footnotes of eternity.

My very good wishes for a thoughtful Christmas — and a blessed New Year.

As always,

O.P. Kretzmann